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SUBJECT: TFX001: FRENCH CASUALTIES AND HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE IN AFTERMATH OF TSUNAMI

¶1. SUMMARY. On December 29, poloff spoke with MFA India Desk Officer, Louis Vassy, about French victims of the tsunami of December 26 and French plans for humanitarian aid

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packages for the regions hit hardest by the disaster. Vassy elaborated on the deaths and voiced concerns that the number of French casualties might rise drastically. He also spoke about French plans to contribute 15 million Euros to United Nations and International Red Cross relief efforts; later in the day it was announced that the 15 million would be part of a larger 22.16 million Euro French relief package. END

SUMMARY

French Victims and a Fear that the Worst is Yet to Come

¶2. Vassy told us that there have been 20 confirmed French casualties as of December 29 from the tsunami -- 19 deaths occurred in Thailand and one in Sri Lanka. While French news reports put the number of French missing at 90, Vassy said that the MFA fears that the number is higher and that the GOF is preparing for the possibility of a sharp increase in the number of French casualties. The MFA announced that the number of French injured is 189. The GOF has established hotlines to facilitate the identification of victims.

The French Aid Package

¶3. On December 29, the French government announced details of an aid package for the victims in the affected region. The package totals 22.16 million Euros (US\$30.1 million) of which 15 million Euros are allocated to humanitarian agencies of the United Nations and the International Red Cross; 1.56 million will go to bilateral assistance in the form of equipment, rescue workers and other specialists; and an additional 5.6 million Euros will be offered as part of a European Union aid package (the French contribution is roughly 17% of the total EU aid package).

¶4. Prior to announcing the package, French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin brought several ministers together to discuss relief efforts in the region to include Minister of the Interior, Dominique de Villepin; Minister of Finance, Herve Gaymard; Minister of Transportation, Gilles de Robien; Minister of Justice, Dominique Perben; and Minister of Health Philippe Douste-Blazy. The ministers heard an account from French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, who had just returned from his emergency trip to Sri Lanka and Thailand to assess damage and coordinate relief.

¶5. Outside of the official aid package, efforts are being made across France through local governments, NGOs and individuals to provide humanitarian aid. In the next few days some 34 tons of food will be sent to the region through Catholic Relief and the French Red Cross; and the French NGO, Doctors without Borders, will send 40 tons of emergency aid supplies to Sri Lanka.

Wolff